



**MEJIRO  
GAKUEN**

**VOL.45**

# Mejiro Exchange

*Mejiro University (Undergraduate, Postgraduate)  
Mejiro University College  
Mejiro Kenshin Junior and Senior High School*

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## Face-To-Face Connections

I often speak about the need for face-to-face interactions in our changing education system and increasingly digital world. I have also cautioned about the proliferation of fully online courses (in this district or elsewhere) as being an important move forward. There is great power in digital learning to support, supplement, and sometimes even replace face-to-face learning, but K-12 should remain, primarily, a face-to-face enterprise as we prepare our future generations. Two weeks ago, I had a great reminder of the power of face-to-face. For more than 20 years the West Vancouver School District has had a relationship with Mejiro Gakuen in Tokyo, Japan. This has been a very enriching relationship for all involved. Each summer, Mejiro sends a large

group of students to West Vancouver to study English and engage in cultural experiences, and we have teacher and student exchanges on a regular basis. Also, over time, those most closely involved with the relationship have retired. Each year, there have been fewer people to explain the history and importance of the relationship. I have heard the stories about the relationship, read briefs and have spoken to a number of teachers and students who have travelled to Mejiro, but I did not truly appreciate this relationship and all of its importance until I had spent some face-to-face time with our friends in Japan. Along with our Board Chair, Cindy Dekker, we were kindly invited to Mejiro, as their guests, to discuss our relationship, renew our bonds of friendship, and build new partnerships. Being the start of the Japanese school year, I had the opportunity to speak at the school's Opening Day, and to all the new parents at Mejiro. I spoke of how technology will connect our world all the

more. I also spoke about the power of relationships – the one true strength as a social tool in reinforcing and deepening the relationships we make in the face-to-face world.

*Chris Kennedy  
Superintendent of Schools, CEO  
West Vancouver School District*



**Chris (fourth right) and Cindy (fifth right) join Mejiro staff in Tokyo**

## Internship Program

### **Takapuna Grammar School, Auckland, New Zealand**

The main reason I applied for the internship program was because I was wondering how well I could teach Japanese as I have been studying Japanese education for 4 years. Also, I was interested in working overseas. One of the good points of living overseas is I thought everything would be new. I could start from zero. Additionally, I could know more about myself, like what I can and can't do. In the beginning it was difficult for me to pro-

nounce English. Unfortunately I repeated myself using the same words and sentences over and over again. But the staff, students and my host family tried to understand what I was saying and for that I am grateful. There were also many differences between my life in Tokyo and New Zealand, like lifestyle, the environment, and how to make relationships. However, I was glad to realise everyone has the same thoughts and attitudes despite growing up with different cultures and in different countries.

Before I went to New Zealand I didn't think I wanted to be a Japanese teacher but now I want to be. This is because I really enjoyed teaching at Takapuna Grammar School and being with the teachers and students. It was such a great time. So I decided I will take the Japanese language teaching competency test. Then I need to pass it and find a job. I'd like to take this opportunity to say I really appreciate participating in the internship at Takapuna Grammar School. I had a great time. I'm so glad I met my host family, the teachers and students. I think New Zealand is one of the most beautiful countries. I want to go back to New Zealand again someday.



**Emiko (center) and Somerville House students**

### **Somerville House, Brisbane, Australia**

I had thought I would like to be a Japanese language teacher in the future and study another culture to mature.

It's not always easy to live abroad because we need to accept and understand people's background. In fact, it was difficult to get used to Australian culture, but I found it wonderful discovering things I didn't know and to appreciate people's kindness. Life in Australia became a very amazing experience for me.

I would now like to go to many countries and continue teaching Japanese and share Japanese culture. I will keep studying and take interests in, not only Japanese, but also other cultures and languages.



**Junko (far right) with Japanese language students**

*Junko Kusumoto*

*Emiko Yanagi*

## Embassy Visits



Mr. Petersson presenting to Mejiro Kenshin students



A student introduces Mr. Sanchez

We are grateful to the staff from the Canadian Embassy and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to offer their time to our students. Here are brief descriptions of their visits to Mejiro Kenshin.

### Canadian Embassy Visit

On December 16th, the Junior 2 students and teachers were treated to a special presentation by the Canadian Embassy. This marks the third visit by the Canadian Embassy since 2009. Mr. Eric Petersson, First Secretary on Academic Relations, gave a power point presentation that taught the students about Canadian history, culture, geography, language and other interesting topics. This visit was the perfect opportunity for the students to learn more about Canada before their school trip to Vancouver this summer. The students especially enjoyed the photos and quiz from the presentation and learned that Canada is a multi-cultural country with people from different backgrounds. Their image of Canada became even better because they learned more about Canada. We are very grateful to Mr. Petersson for his visit to our school.

### U.S. Embassy Visit

We were very pleased to welcome two speakers from the U.S. Embassy on May 25th to speak to the high school students and staff. Ms. Rei Yamazaki, Educational Outreach Country Coordinator in the Public Affairs Section spoke about many ways to study in the United States and how to get information from the Education USA Centers. Mr. Felix Sanchez, Second Secretary and Vice Council, Department of State gave a power point presentation on the merits of studying in the United States. He also provided valuable advice to the high school students on making choices for their future based on his own experience. We are very grateful to Ms. Yamazaki and Mr. Sanchez for their visit to our school.

*Ms. Haruko Morimoto  
Head, International Education Department*

### Student Comments

I enjoyed the presentations very much. I didn't know much about American universities before, but I learned many things about them today, like that there are over 4000 universities and that they are kind to international students. I was afraid to study in the U.S. but after today's presentations, I really want to go.

*Yuma Hayabuchi  
Senior 2*

This was my first time to hear about studying abroad in the U.S. I really enjoyed the presentations today because I could learn so many things. I thought studying in another country was only about studying at school, but I realized that there are many other things to be learned. I was surprised to find out that there are no cram schools and that students do most of their learning at school.

*Rina Hayashida  
Senior 2*

## School Trip to Australia: Proving Myself



Akiha (2nd right) and fellow Australian group students

I went to Australia for ten days. The season in Australia was late summer. I was so nervous because I had never been to a foreign country outside of Asia, but when we arrived at the airport in Australia, my anxiety disappeared without my noticing it. The weather was fantastic, and everything that I looked at was interesting and wonderful. I felt very excited about being in a new place.

Even though I was there for ten days, I actually spent only one week with my host family. My host mother was good at cooking and my host sister was a really friendly person. I am glad that I could grow closer with them.

While I was there, I commuted to school. I learned many things about the history of Australia, as well as some Australian songs. Unfortunately, there was not much time to get to know the other students at school, but I had a really good time.

This trip was very good for me. It was a chance for me to prove to myself that I could use English. Even though I have been learning English for years, I had no confidence in my ability. This trip is my proof that I can communicate in English. If there are others like me, then I strongly recommend that you go. I promise that you will not regret it!

*Akiha Suzuki  
Senior 3*

## My Short-Term Exchange in Canada



I went to Canada as an international student for about 3 months. My host sister, Natalie Cook, came to my school for a year so I was not very nervous about being able to communicate with her.

I felt a sense of fulfillment going to school in Canada. My best memory of my time in Canada was Japanese class consisting of Canadians, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese and

German students. I was their tutor for Japanese. One of the students asked me questions like "Why do you pronounce 'ha' like 'wa'?" and "Why do you say hotcake for pancake in Japan?" I was surprised by these questions and I could not answer them at first. However, I realized that these things were wonders to them because they were not familiar with Japanese culture, and it was wonderful to talk about Japanese culture in English.

I was able to talk about Japanese culture and customs in English, and I could learn about the traditions of various countries because I went to study in Canada. Because I taught Japanese every day over there, I really hope that everyone in the class learned to like Japan even more. And, I would like to talk with all of them again once I improve my English.

I did not host an overseas student so I had few chances to talk with overseas students. However, I will talk to future exchange students who come to Mejiro and tell them many things about Japan.

*Kurumi Taniguchi*  
Senior 3

## Returning to Japan

During 2010-2011, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to live and study in Japan for a year. While I was there, I experienced a lot of new things, like Japanese food, the culture and, of course, the language. Everyone was very kind and I was sad to go, due to the fact that I wasn't sure when I'd get to see everyone again.

In January 2012, my family and I returned to Japan for vacation. Our trip started in Niseko, which is a famous ski resort in Hokkaido and where the daughter of my host family in Tokyo, Yuna Iketani, joined us as well. My favourite part of Niseko was probably the food. The restaurants were all really cool and cozy and the food was amazing.

The next place we went to was Kyoto. There were paper dolls that you wrote your troubles on and put in water. Once they dissolved, your troubles dissolved with them. I love all the different traditions and beliefs surrounding Japanese culture.

After Kyoto, we traveled to Tokyo by train. It was really great to be back in the city. I was able to visit all the places I had frequented while I was living in Tokyo. It felt like I hadn't been there in ages, even if it had only been several months. I visited Mejiro and I was very happy to see everyone, but very sad that I would have to leave again after such a short visit. I think everyone was happy to see me too! I hope that I'll be able to visit again soon.

*Natalie Cook*  
Sentinel Secondary School, Canada

## Experiences in Vancouver, Canada

I went to Canada for about two and a half months as an exchange student to improve my English and learn about Canadian culture. I went to Collingwood School in West Vancouver. I took science, math, English, art, drama, dance and P.E. At first, I could not understand what everybody at school was saying. There were no Japanese students around me and no one could speak Japanese. It was really hard for me at first, but all of my friends and teachers were very, very kind to me. Everyone taught me many things about school, students, Canada and much more.

Of course, my host family was really great. There were six people in my host family, the Yamaokas: my host sister, Anna; her father and mother; her little brother; her little sister; and her cousin. They were so nice and always cheerful. Anna's mother and cousin are German-Mexican so I learned



**Mami (left) and her host sister, Anna (second left) in Mexico**

about German and Mexican culture. Anna, her cousin and I grew really close. We often talked about many things, and even now we still send messages to each other.

I had a lot of good experiences. One week after I arrived in Canada, my host family and I went to Mexico and San Diego as volunteers for four days. As we drove through Mexico, I became sad when I saw the present situation of the poor people there. After four days, we finished building a house. I was really glad and it is one of my greatest experiences ever.

Other than that, I saw NHL and soccer games, skied on the weekends, and went to a lot of parties. For New Year's we saw a performance and fireworks after a dance party on the snow. I enjoyed doing all of these things. I had amazing experiences there. I will never forget my time in Canada and I would like to visit there again.

*Mami Tanaka*  
Senior 3

## My Japanese Exchange

I started learning Japanese when I was in year 7. Ever since then I have had an interest in Japan and wanted to keep learning the language, and further my knowledge of the country and culture. I came to Japan 2 years ago on a school trip and had an amazing experience and couldn't wait to return. When I heard about this exchange I knew it was for me and wanted to participate straight away.

My host family, the Yamamotos, has been so kind to me during my time here and encouraged me to try new things. I really liked my host mother's cooking, especially omu rice (egg omelet over tomato flavored rice) and curry rice. Often I would watch cheerleading after school because my host sister was in the cheerleading club. I had a lot of fun and the cheerleading was amazing.

Coming to Japan has been an amazing experience and one that I will definitely never forget. A few of my highlights from my time here were

going to DisneySea, Ghibli Museum, watching a cheerleading competition, trying new foods and making so many new friends.

I went on an excursion each week and that was fun because I got to see lots of different things and go to different places. One of my favorite places was Tokyo Tower because it had an amazing view and lots of Hello Kitty charms that were so cute! I really enjoyed attending school at Mejiro and everyone was so kind and welcoming and that made my time so much more enjoyable. I enjoyed being immersed in a new and completely different culture and being able to see how family and school life is different from Australia. I am going to miss Japan so much but I want to return one day.

*Ashlea Ryder*  
Ogilvie High School, Australia



**Ashlea (third left) and Mejiro friends**

## An International Local



**Jenny and her host family**

Prior to this exchange, I had been to Japan three times with my family, and once on a two week school exchange. I came all these times to visit my family from my mother's side in Omishima, Ehime where my Grandmother lives, Osaka and Matsuyama where my aunties live, and many

other places such as Kyoto, Nara, Hiroshima and Kessennuma. But none of these visits have given me an experience and opportunities like this one. As a half Japanese, this country is a second home to me, and so far it hasn't failed to impress. On the eve of my arrival into my new family for 2

and a half months, I was very nervous yet hugely excited about the potentially life-changing experiences I was to have in Japan while on exchange. By the first night I knew that everything would be perfectly fine.

I chose to participate in this exchange, not only to learn Japanese, but to get an insight into the general way of life of a normal student instead of just a tourist's perspective. I think visiting Japan is equally important as learning the language itself. I also came to further understand my own culture and country that in the future I may live in. I wanted to learn Japanese to communicate with my family here in Japan, to broaden my options in adulthood, and because the language is one of the most beautiful in the world. From this trip I hope to gain confidence in speaking Japanese casually, become more independent, and to have a greater appreciation for Japan and its culture. The family that I am staying with is the best anyone could have asked for. They take me out to new places every weekend like Mt Takao, Ueno Zoo, and soon Disneyland! They are all so kind and welcoming. When my host sister, Nanae, comes to New Zealand, I will take her to lots of tourist attractions, local sites and other places of interest that she will hopefully enjoy.

*Jenny Palmer*

*Takapuna Grammar School, New Zealand*

## A Home Away From Home



**Ginger at Imperial Palace, Tokyo**

In late April I was given the opportunity to travel to Somerville House's sister school, Mejiro Kenshin in Tokyo, for a 2 ½ month exchange. Prior to my departure from Brisbane I was nervous and very scared, however, despite my initial apprehension, my exchange experience was life changing. Throughout my time in Tokyo, I experienced everything there was on offer from visiting the magical Disneyland and DisneySea to meeting sumo wrestlers, riding a rickshaw through Tokyo, seeing many beautiful Japanese shrines and temples and so much more. Although I was spoiled with such great experiences, the simple things like learning to cook with my host mother,

conversations at school with my new Japanese friends, family meals together and playing with my host family's pet chinchilla with my little host brother are what I treasure the most from my exchange.

Every day in Japan brought with it fun, laughter, memories and many challenges. I found it so rewarding when I was able to overcome the challenges I was faced with, be it catching the train home alone to being able to say a phrase in Japanese that I had been struggling with. Despite standing out in my bright green Somerville dress, blue eyes and red hair, by the end of my exchange, Tokyo truly became a home away from

home and I didn't want to leave! This life changing experience wouldn't have been possible without the organisation by both Mejiro Kenshin and Somerville House staff. I have gained invaluable cultural understanding and language skills that cannot be found by sitting in a classroom. My time in Japan has given me many life long memories, a second family and friendships that I couldn't have gained anywhere else.

*Ginger Kelly-Watrous*

*Somerville House, Australia*



**Ginger & Jenny (far left and right, front row) and the Mejiro Kenshin International Club members**

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